

## Article

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## **SKAGWAY, WHITEHORSE AND THE WHITE PASS AND YUKON ROUTE RAILWAY**

*by*

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### **ABSTRACT**

The *White Pass and Yukon Route*, a 177 km narrow gauge railway linking the Alaskan coastal port of Skagway with Whitehorse, capital of the Yukon Territory, ceased operations in October, 1982, a casualty of the economic recession of the early 1980s which brought about the collapse of the Territory's hardrock mining industry. The railway had been constructed by British interests between 1898 and 1900, that is, in the aftermath of the Klondike gold rush, and had been in continuous operation since that time. In this paper, the author traces the broad lines of the history of the railway and shows the various ways in which it influenced the development of Skagway and of Whitehorse, its ocean and inland termini respectively. The closing of the railway was a major blow to Skagway, where White Pass Transportation and its subsidiaries were the principal employers, and where over two-thirds of the railway's employees were located. The closing appears to have had a more limited impact on Whitehorse, a much larger community whose economy is now highly diversified.

**KEY WORDS:** *White Pass and Yukon Route railway, Skagway, Whitehorse, Alaska, Yukon, architecture, tourism, Cyprus Anvil mine.*

### **RÉSUMÉ**

#### **Skagway, Whitehorse et le chemin de fer *White Pass and Yukon Route***

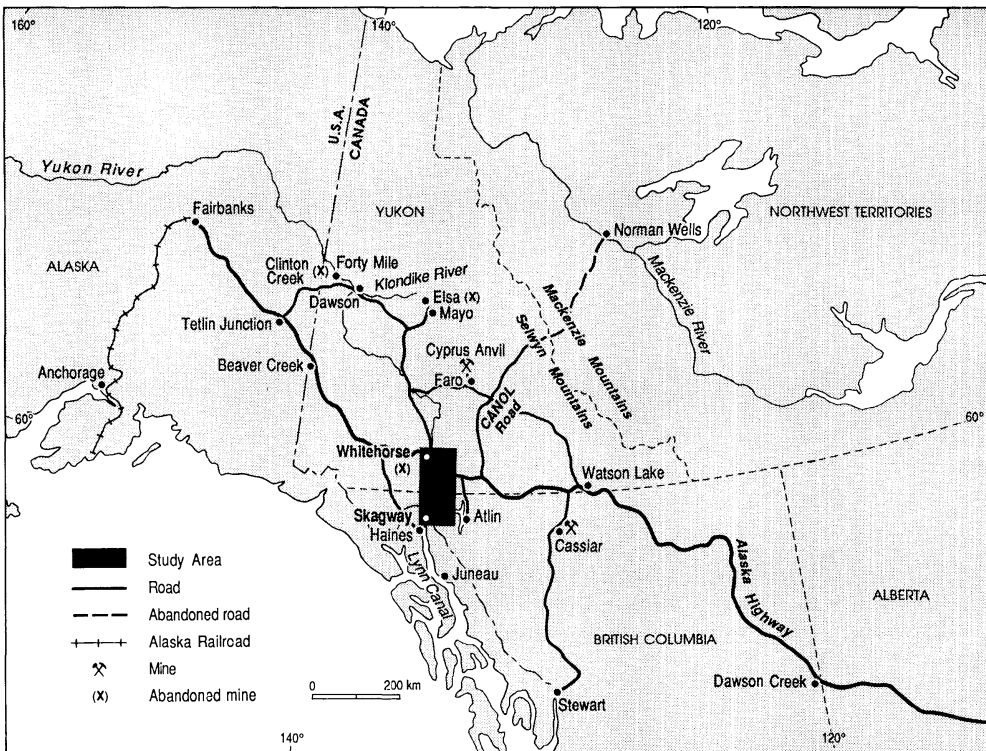
Jusqu'en octobre 1982, le chemin de fer à voie étroite *White Pass and Yukon Route*, d'une longueur de 177 km, reliait le village côtier alaskien de Skagway et la ville de Whitehorse, capitale du territoire du Yukon; il avait été construit entre 1898 et 1900 par des intérêts britanniques dans la foulée de la ruée vers l'or du Klondike et avait fonctionné de façon continue depuis lors. Sa fermeture a été provoquée par la récession économique du début des années 1980 et l'effondrement de l'économie minière du Yukon qui a suivi. Dans cet article, l'auteur retrace les grandes lignes de l'histoire de ce chemin de fer en insistant sur la façon dont il a influencé le développement de ses terminus océanique et intérieur, c'est-à-dire Skagway et Whitehorse. La fermeture du chemin de fer fut un coup dur pour Skagway, où la compagnie White Pass Transportation et ses filiales étaient les principaux employeurs et où résidaient plus des deux tiers des employés du chemin de fer. La fermeture semble avoir eu un impact moins marqué sur Whitehorse, ville beaucoup plus peuplée et dotée d'une économie plus diversifiée.

**MOTS-CLÉS:** *Chemin de fer White Pass and Yukon Route, Skagway, Whitehorse, Alaska, Yukon, architecture, tourisme, mine Cyprus Anvil.*

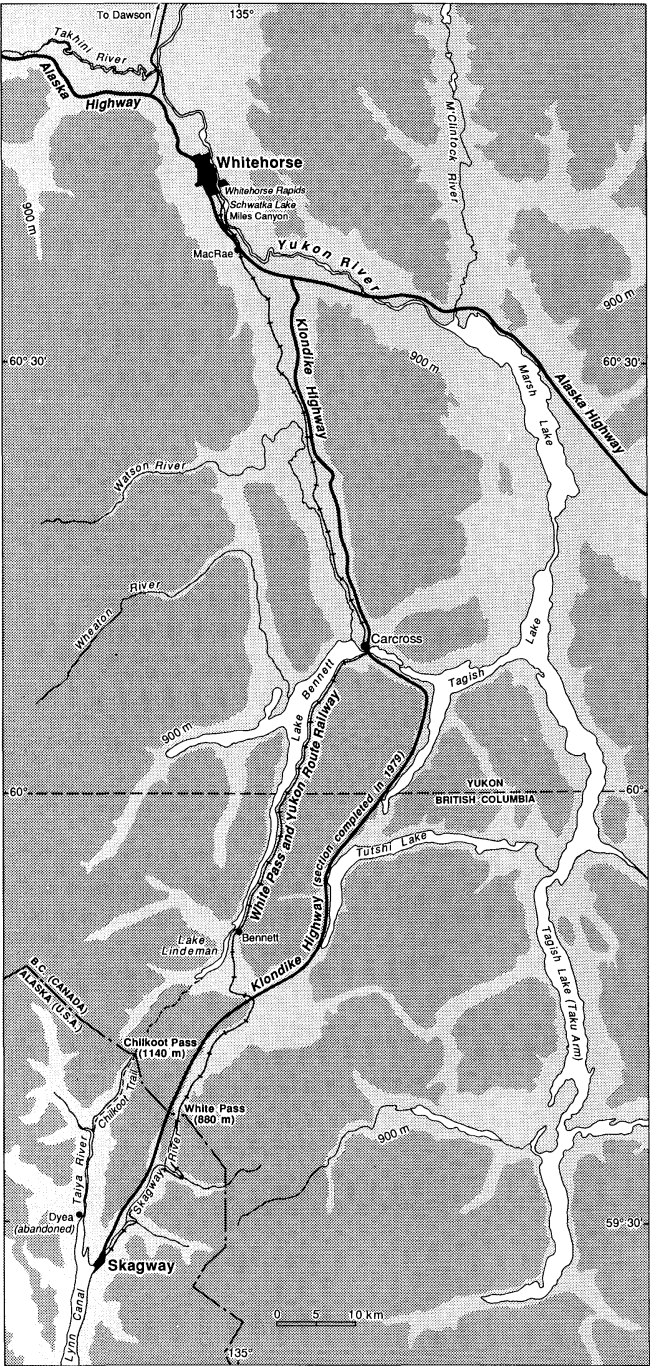
Figure 1

## THE SKAGWAY - WHITEHORSE CORRIDOR AND ITS REGIONAL CONTEXT

### LOCALITIES REFERRED TO IN THE ACCOMPANYING TEXT



ROUTES OF THE WHITE PASS AND YUKON ROUTE RAILWAY, 1900-1982  
AND OF THE SOUTH KLONDIKE HIGHWAY, 1979



In October, 1982, the White Pass and Yukon Corporation's 177 km narrow gauge railway linking Whitehorse in the Yukon Territory with the Alaskan coastal port of Skagway ceased operations for the first time in its long history (figure 1). The parent company, Federal Industries Ltd. of Winnipeg, subsequently indicated that the railway should be considered permanently closed. The histories of both the railway and the Yukon had been inextricably linked since the beginning of the century: for Yukoners, the *White Pass* was a lifeline to the sea as well as the route along which an abundant mineral wealth flowed to the outside world. The shutdown occurred at a time when the Territorial economy was severely depressed and was therefore a major psychological blow for residents. For the next five and one-half years, that is until the spring of 1988, there was no rail traffic whatsoever along the line. However, improved communications with the coast were necessitated by the reopening in 1986 of the Anvil mine at Faro, Y.T., once White Pass's biggest customer and whose own shutdown in 1982 had been the immediate cause for the closing of the railway. The Carcross-to-Skagway section of the South Klondike Highway, a seasonal road to the coast completed in 1979, was opened to year-round traffic in 1986, and has been greatly improved since then, mainly to facilitate truck shipments of lead-zinc concentrates from Faro to Skagway. Around the same time, White Pass reopened its freight terminal at Skagway, using trucks to move goods into and out of the Territory. During the summers of 1988 and 1989, the company reintroduced tourist excursions on the short but scenic Alaska section of the railway; the clientele consists largely of cruise ship passengers and purchasers of package tours. At the same time, however, White Pass sold off its fleet of ore cars, and it continues to offer for sale certain other elements of its rolling stock. It would appear, then, that the railway will never again be used to haul ore or freight, although there may well be a future for seasonal passenger rail service along certain sections of the line.

The purpose of this essay is to trace the broad lines of the history of the White Pass and Yukon Route railway and to show the various ways in which it has influenced the development of its ocean terminus, Skagway, and its inland terminus, Whitehorse, from the beginning of the century until the present (figure 2). Obviously the two communities have evolved differently, notably since the construction of the Alaska Highway through Whitehorse in 1942. Skagway, once a boom town with a population, albeit transient, of at least 10 000, and Alaska's first incorporated city, is now a community of only 700 or so, although enlivened by the arrival of cruise ships, coastal ferries, and the occasional ore carrier. In contrast, Whitehorse, with a population of about 20 000 (1989), is a Territorial capital, a business and commercial centre, and the hub of the Yukon's thriving tourist industry. The closing of the railway was a major blow to Skagway, where White Pass Transportation and its subsidiaries were the principal employers and where over two-thirds of the railway's employees were located. The closing was also greatly deplored in Whitehorse, but appears to have had a more limited impact on the city's economy, which is now highly diversified. In fact, the city's close ties with the WP&YR had been gradually loosening since World War II; until that time, Whitehorse, located at the head of navigation on the Yukon River, had served primarily as a transshipment point within the White Pass transportation system and was completely dependent upon the company for its continued existence (Koroscil, 1988, p. 283).

## BEGINNINGS

Skagway, Whitehorse and the White Pass and Yukon Route railway all owe their origins to the great Klondike gold rush of 1897-98 (figure 3). The fabulously rich placer

Figure 2

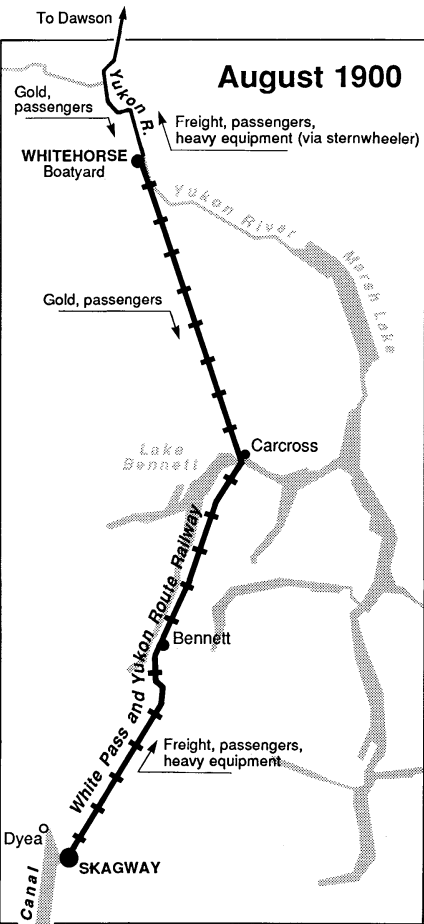
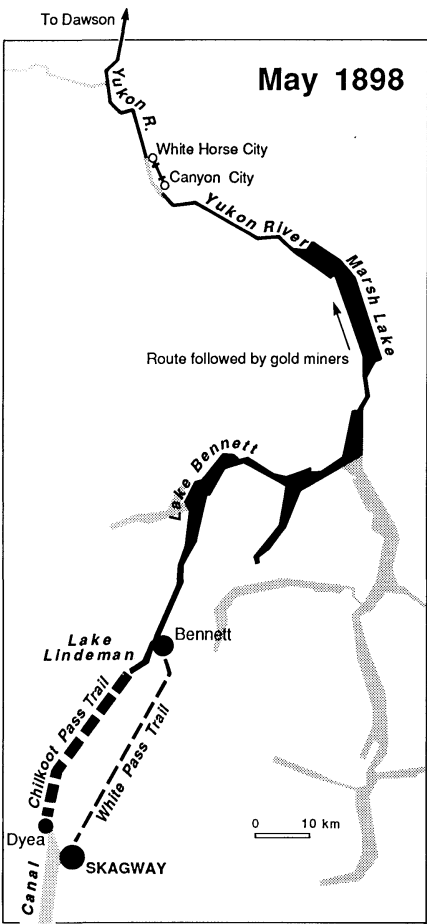
TRANSPORTATION ROUTES AND TRAFFIC FLOWS,  
SKAGWAY - WHITEHORSE CORRIDOR, 1898-1989

MAY 1898

In 1898, the Chilkoot Trail and the White Pass Trail were both in use, each giving access to the upper Yukon River system at Bennett. From here, the route to the Klondike was entirely by river, with the exception of the turbulent waters between the head of Miles Canyon and the foot of Whitehorse Rapids. In May 1898, the population of Skagway was about 10 000, and the population of Bennett, a tent city, was about the same. Both towns emptied quickly following the breakup of the ice cover on Lake Bennett on May 29, 1898.

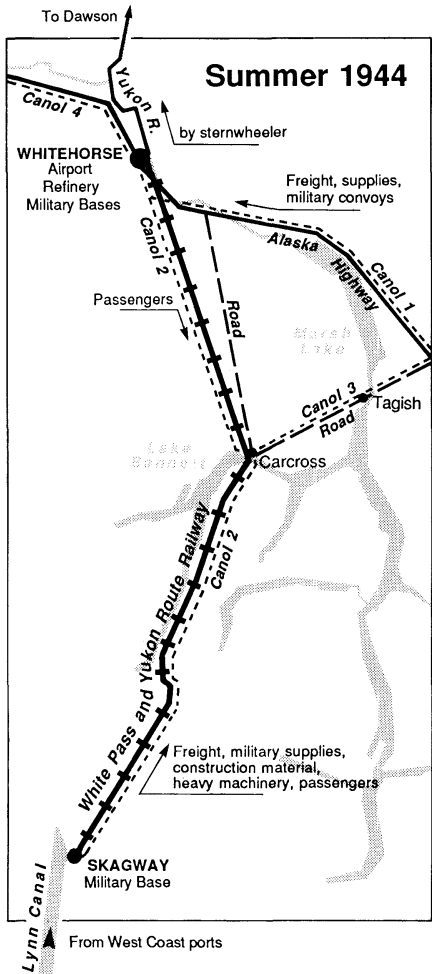
AUGUST 1900

Through rail service to Whitehorse along the new White Pass and Yukon Route Railway was initiated on July 30, 1900. The Chilkoot and White Pass trails had earlier been abandoned, and the towns of Dyea and Bennett were now dying. Skagway's population had fallen to about 3 100 and would continue to shrink dramatically in the years which followed. However, Whitehorse, with about 1 000 inhabitants, was now an important river port and transshipment centre. During the ice-free season, sternwheelers constructed in its busy boatyard provided regular passenger and freight service as far as Dawson.



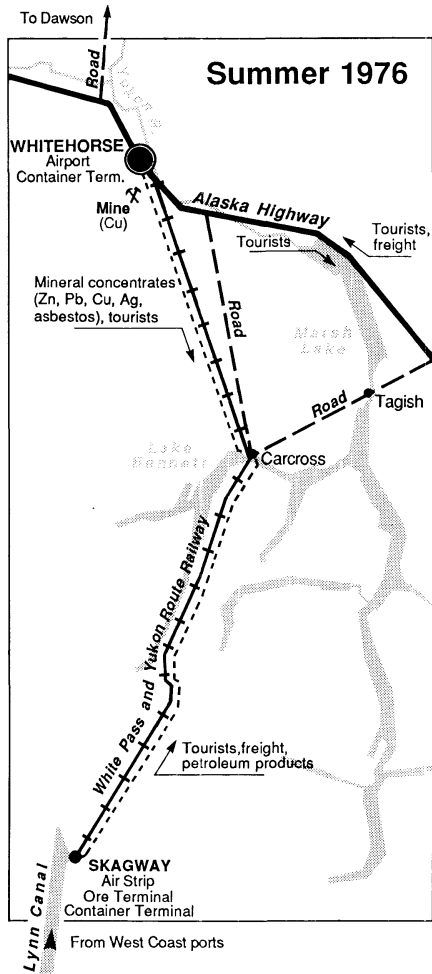
SUMMER 1944

By 1944, the Alaska Highway between Dawson Creek and Fairbanks, Alaska, was fully operational as a military road. However, the WP&YR Railway remained the principal route of entry to the Territory, notably for shipments of construction materials and freight. The CANOL system was now more or less complete, the refinery at Whitehorse was operational, and a large new military airport was being constructed overlooking the town. Gravel roads had been completed from Whitehorse to Carcross and from Carcross to Tagish and beyond. The population of Whitehorse was now about 8 000, however it had been considerably in excess of this during 1942 and 1943.



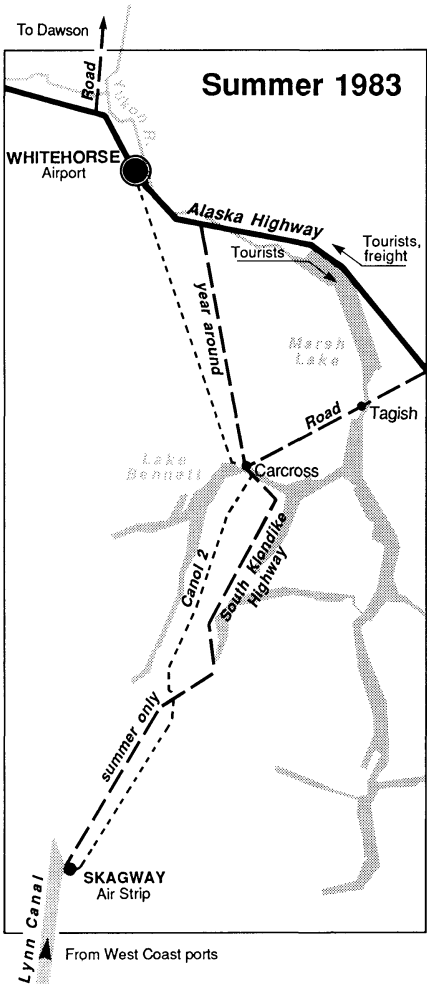
SUMMER 1976

During the 1970s, enormous volumes of ore notably from the Anvil open-pit mine at Faro, were shipped south via the WP&YR Railway to the large new terminal at Skagway. Petroleum products arriving in Skagway by container ship were dispatched north to Whitehorse either in tank cars or along the old CANOL No. 2 pipeline. The majority of visitors to the Territory were now arriving via the Alaska Highway, which had been opened to tourist traffic in 1947. A road link to Dawson, completed in 1955, had replaced the old Yukon River sternwheeler service. Whitehorse, now the capital of the Territory, had a population of 13 300 in 1976.



**SUMMER 1983**

The economy of the Territory was now in recession, and all of its hard rock mines had been shut down, some permanently. Rail service between Whitehorse and Skagway was suspended as of October 1982, and at the same time the ore and freight terminals at Skagway were mothballed. However, in 1979 a summer road, the South Klondike Highway, was completed between Skagway and Carcross, and by 1983 it was being used intensively by tourists and other travellers. However, most visitors to Whitehorse continued to arrive via the Alaska Highway, as did almost all shipments of general freight from the south.



**SUMMER 1989**

The economy of the Yukon began to improve beginning in 1986, and the mine at Faro became operational once again; concentrates were trucked to tidewater along the greatly-improved South Klondike Highway, now open year-round. A small section of the railway back of Skagway was nevertheless reopened during the summers of 1988 and 1989, primarily to provide day excursions for cruise ship passengers. The WP&YR also reopened its freight terminal at Skagway. Despite these developments, the Alaska Highway, now largely paved, remains the principal route of entry to the Yukon both for visitors and for freight shipments.

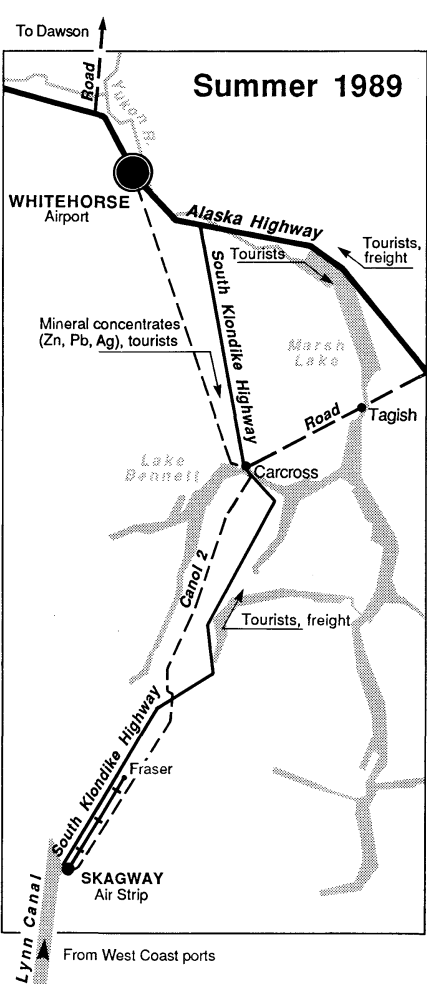
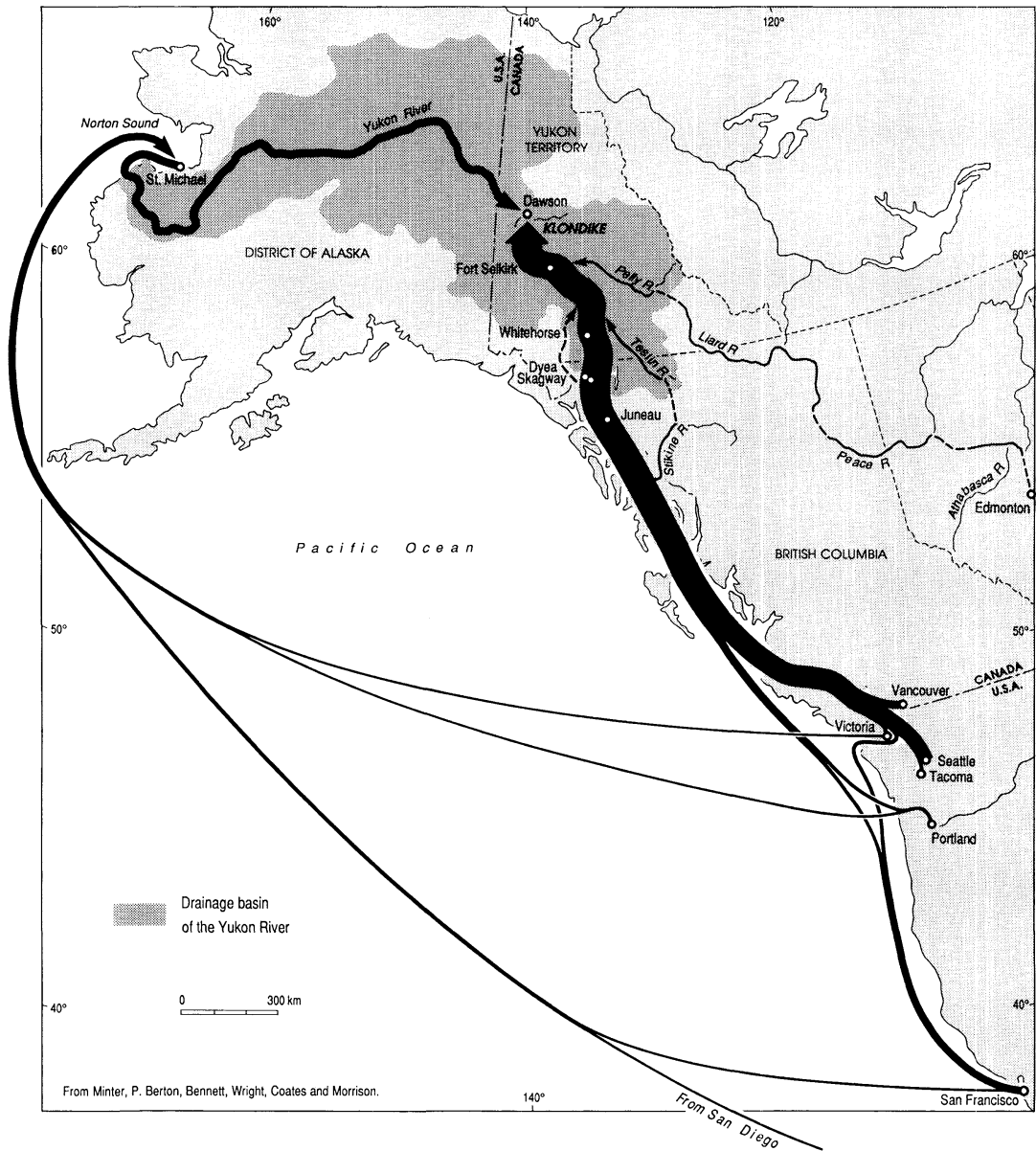




Figure 3

PRINCIPAL ROUTES TO THE KLONDIKE GOLD FIELDS



From Minter, P. Berton, Bennett, Wright, Coates and Morrison.

gold deposits of the Klondike River, a minor tributary of the Yukon River and whose mouth lies 80 km east of the Canada-Alaska boundary, were discovered in August, 1896, but it was not until mid-July of 1897 that news of the strike reached the outside world. All that summer and autumn, coastal steamers from Seattle, Portland, Tacoma, San Francisco, Vancouver and Victoria, crowded with amateur prospectors and adventurers, departed for Alaska. Although there were a number of routes to the gold fields, including an all-water route up the Yukon River from its mouth, the fastest and least expensive way to reach the Klondike was to travel *down* the Yukon from its headwaters near the Alaskan coast, a voyage of about 965 km. But to reach the lakes at the head of the Yukon river system, and, more specifically, Lake Bennett or its tributary, Lake Lindeman, travellers first had to cross the rugged western rim of the Coast Mountains immediately back of the fjord called Lynn Canal. The overland hike was relatively short (43 or 72 km depending upon the route selected), but the terrain and the weather were forbidding. Also, because the North West Mounted Police required each prospector to carry in a year's supply of food in addition to his equipment, the trek across the mountains had to be repeated again and again. "If they carried everything themselves, shuttling their loads from cache to cache, they had to hike as much as 1 000 miles (1 600 km) before they were ready to build boats and float to Dawson City" (Satterfield, 1978, p. 2).

Two small cuts through the mountains back of Lynn Canal led to the headwaters of the Yukon: the Chilkoot Pass and the White Pass. The Chilkoot Pass had been used by the aboriginal population long before the arrival of the whites. Explorers, traders and prospectors had been travelling it since 1880 (Wright, 1976, p. 137); Satterfield (1978, p. 6) estimates that more than a thousand whites used the Chilkoot Trail in the two decades before the great stampede. The Chilkoot Trail was only 43 km long, but the pass itself was 250 m higher than the White Pass, and the approaches to it were steeper. The trail emerged at the west end of Lake Lindeman, which was navigable. A short portage at the east end of the lake gave access to the much larger Lake Bennett, and from here there were no impediments to navigation until just above the site of present-day Whitehorse.

In contrast, the White Pass, only a few kilometres to the south, and named in honour of a Canadian Minister of the Interior of the period, was scarcely known before the gold rush. It was discovered in 1887 by William Moore, founder of Skagway, who subsequently became its greatest promoter. The White Pass Trail was longer than the Chilkoot Trail (72 km from the coast to Lake Bennett) and was more dangerous because of its precipitous hillslopes and deep gorges. However, the pass itself was lower (it stands at 880 m above sea level), and the grades leading up to it were not nearly as steep. After the trail was improved, pack horses could be taken over it, which was not possible in the case of the Chilkoot Trail. However, the first miners to use Moore's trail did not do so until 1895, and until the great stampede of 1897-1898 only a handful of adventurers had travelled it.

## THE BIRTH OF SKAGWAY

In the late summer of 1897, two towns sprang up at the head of Lynn Canal to service the trails leading to the gold fields. One was Dyea (pronounced Dyee) at the mouth of the Taiya River, whose headwaters were fed by the glaciers and snowfields of the Chilkoot Pass itself. In the mid-1880s, two traders, John J. Healy and Edgar Wilson, established a trading post at the mouth of the Taiya, and it was around this post that the

town of Dyea developed. By the autumn of 1897 its population was already about 1 200, and by the following spring it had reached 4 000. In 1897-1898, some 22 000 stampeders crossed the Chilkoot Pass; all of these would necessarily have travelled through Dyea. When the Chilkoot Pass was finally abandoned in favour of the White Pass (1899), the town died a quick death. "The post office established in 1896 in Dyea closed its doors forever in 1902, and in 1906 only one man lived in the decaying town" (Satterfield, 1978, p. 157). Today, even the ruins of the town are scarcely visible.

The town of Skagway was established at the mouth of the Skagway (Skaguay) River, which, like the Taiya, debouches into Lynn Canal. Its first resident was the aforementioned William Moore, a Northwest Coast riverboat captain and, more recently, the discoverer and promoter of the White Pass. In October, 1887, at the age of 65, Moore laid claim to a 65 ha (160 acres) homestead at the mouth of the river; he devoted part of the next ten years to readying the site and the trail for the great gold rush to the Yukon which he foresaw. With financial backing obtained in May 1896 from a London-based financial syndicate (the Alaskan and North Western Territories Trading Company), Moore and one of his sons completed a crude wharf on Skagway Bay, a sawmill on its south shore (which eventually provided much of the lumber for the building of the town), and a rudimentary pack trail and bridges along the lower course of the Skagway River. Moore obviously planned to control all aspects of the development of Skagway. However, when the gold rush ship *SS Queen* arrived at the head of Skagway Bay on July 29, 1897, the disembarking stampeders jumped Moore's claim and within a matter of weeks had laid out a town of 3 600 building lots on the site, most of which were quickly sold. Moore pursued the matter in the courts, and, in 1901, he and his associates were awarded 25% of the assessed value of all the lots within the original townsite of Skagway (Spude, 1983, p. 42). He also derived considerable income from his sawmill and wharf, and eventually sold the latter to the White Pass and Yukon Route.

## SKAGWAY : THE SITE

Skagway was laid out on a long, narrow gravel flat at the mouth of the Skagway River (figure 4). The site was contained on the east and west by steep, spruce-cloaked mountain ridges, and on the southwest by the ice-free tidal waters of Skagway Bay. The only land available for expansion lay to the northeast, that is, along the river valley. Consequently, the main arteries of the town, namely Broadway, State, Main and Alaska streets, were laid out SW-NE, that is, along the axis of the river. Twenty-seven numbered cross streets, all fairly short, were laid out at right angles to the main arteries. First Avenue was located immediately back of the wharves and the gravel beach; Twenty-Seventh Avenue lay far up the Skagway valley and on the west bank of the river. Today, however, the built-up section of the town does not extend much beyond Fifteenth Avenue, and those sections of the townsite which were laid out on the west bank have been abandoned.

Topography permitting, the city blocks of Skagway were 91,5 m wide and 67 m deep (300' × 220'). Each contained twelve building lots measuring 15,2 m by 30,5 m (50' × 100'). All streets and avenues were 18 m wide, with the exception of Broadway, which was 24,4 m. The basic elements of this city plan were adopted by the Skagway City Council on March 8, 1898, and have not been changed since, although there have been modifications resulting from the shrinking of the town. During the winter of 1897-98, most of the lots in the town were occupied, for "winter had blocked the White Pass

and closed the Yukon River, so the rush of goldseekers had accumulated on the coast where they were unloaded by the steamers" (Graves, 1908, p. 15). The very impassability of the trail thus helped to explain the rapid growth of Skagway (Berton, 1972, p. 145). At this time, the town consisted largely of simple frame buildings, log cabins, wooden shanties and tents. Its population was of the order of 8 000–10 000, and it was by far the largest community in the District of Alaska.

## CONSTRUCTION OF THE WHITE PASS AND YUKON RAILWAY

The emergence of Skagway as the principal and eventually the only town at the head of Lynn Canal was explained by the abandonment of the Chilkoot Trail and the adoption by travellers of the longer White Pass route. During the great stampede of 1897–1898, only 5 000 goldrushers used the White Pass Trail to cross the Coast Mountains. Portions of the trail were in appalling condition, resulting in the death of several thousand pack horses. However, because of the easier gradients, the long-term prospects for the White Pass Trail were better than those of its rival.

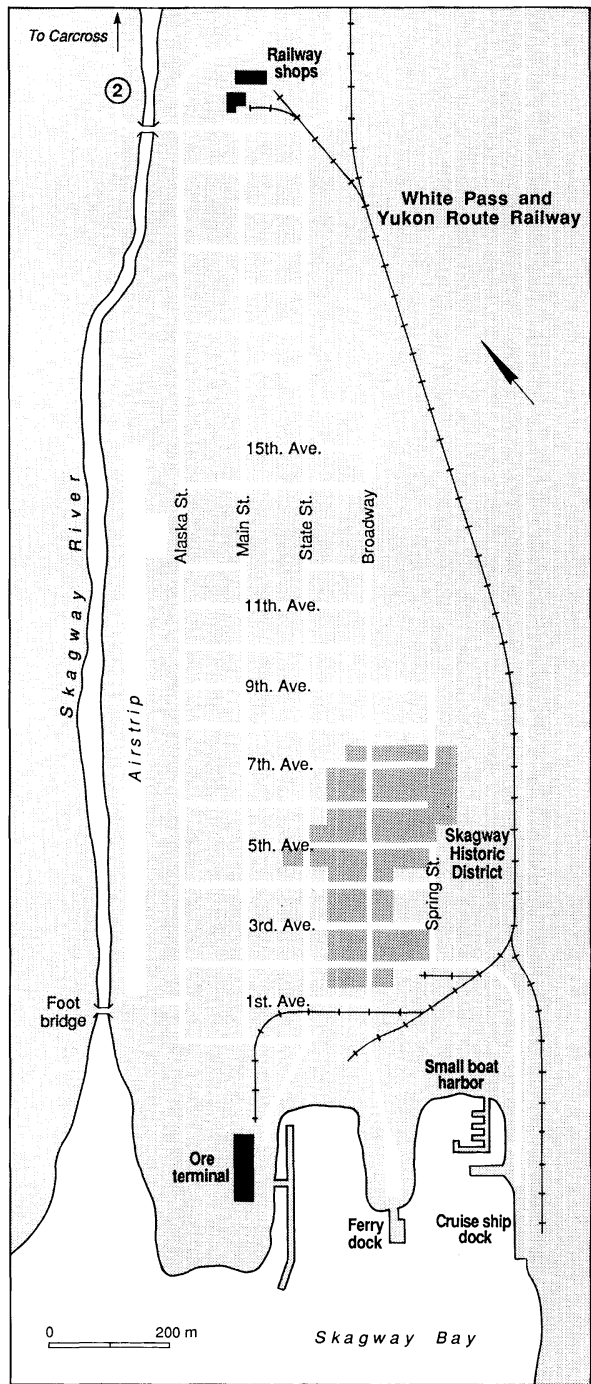
At this time, several companies applied for charters to build a railway into the Yukon (Minter, 1987). The London financial house of Close Brothers won out and selected the White Pass route for the enterprise; as a consequence, the holding company established for this purpose, which was incorporated in Britain, was named the White Pass and Yukon Railway Company Ltd. Skagway was the obvious site for the establishment of the marine terminus of the railway, in part because of its deepwater harbour (in contrast, Dyea was situated at the head of extensive mudflats). Later, it was decided that the inland terminus would be located at the head of navigation on the Yukon River, that is immediately below the White Horse Rapids. Close Brothers was obliged to secure separate charters in order to construct the line through the three different areas of jurisdiction, namely Alaska, British Columbia and the Yukon. The project appealed to the promoters because of the benefits which would obviously accrue to it from the gold rush, but also because of the other identified mineral resources of the Yukon basin, hitherto untapped.

Construction of the *White Pass and Yukon Route* railway (referred to in this text as the WP&YR) began at Skagway on May 28, 1898, and continued virtually without respite until July 29, 1900, when the last spike was driven. Working conditions were difficult, especially during the first stages of construction when supplies from Seattle were difficult to obtain and when heavy equipment was totally lacking. In order to respect the timetable, some of the more difficult stretches of the line had to be constructed in winter. Elaborate wooden trestles were built to bridge the deep gorges, and a tunnel through a mountain was hacked out virtually by hand. The labour force was inexperienced and transient: many of the men were prospectors attempting to finance their trip to the Klondike. However, the engineers were skilled and resourceful, and the financing from London was substantial. When the railway was completed in 1900, it was regarded by some as the greatest engineering feat of its time (Martin, 1974, p. 38). Also, the spectacular steel cantilever arch across Dead Horse Gulch, not completed until 1901, was the highest railway bridge of its kind in the world.

The gauge of the White Pass and Yukon Route railway, that is the distance between the rails, was only 91,4 cm, as opposed to the standard North American railroad gauge of 1,44 m. A standard gauge allows the rolling stock of different companies to be interchanged, but in the case of the remote WP&YR it was not necessary to plan for

Figure 4

**PRESENT-DAY SKAGWAY**



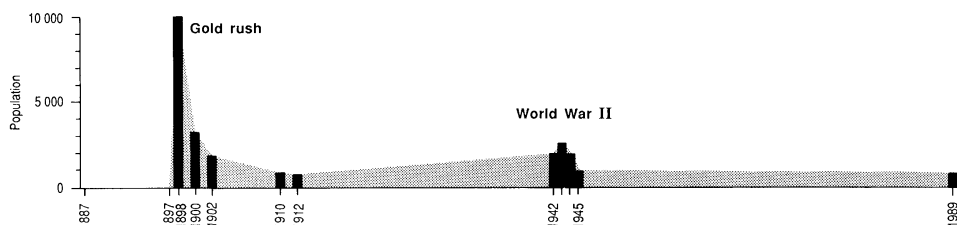
such an eventuality. The costs of construction of a narrow gauge railway are generally lower than those for a standard gauge, because the roadbed is narrower (about 3 m in the case of the WP&YR, but 4,6 m for a standard gauge railway) and the rails and rolling stock are lighter. Also, it would have proved prohibitively expensive to construct a standard gauge roadbed along the most difficult sections of the route, notably along the sheer face of Tunnel Mountain. The WP&YR acquired much of its rolling stock from other narrow gauge North American railways; however, it also converted some stock from standard to narrow gauge in its Skagway shops, which were laid out on the north side of town.

On July 29, 1900, the ceremonial last spike of the WP&YR was driven at Caribou Crossing (now Carcross), Y.T., and through rail service along the 176,6 km route between Skagway and the new town of Whitehorse began on the following day. The railway initially was highly profitable. In 1901, the WP&YR's first full operating year, the company's net earnings were 1,5 \$ million. Capital costs (10 \$ million for construction and 2,5 \$ million for rolling stock) appear to have been completely liquidated during the first few years of operation. For a time the railway carried significant volumes of northbound freight, notably the hydraulic equipment and giant dredges which were now being used to extract gold from the gravels of the Klondike basin. Also, from 1911 to the end of World War I, there was considerable production of copper ore in the Whitehorse area, with daily ore trains leaving for Skagway on a year-round basis. In addition, summer tourism was taking hold in the Yukon. Skagway was now a cruise ship stop, and a side trip from the quaint seaport to Lake Bennett or to Whitehorse along "the most scenic railroad in the world" was a highlight of any tourist itinerary. The population of Skagway had nevertheless fallen off badly, and by 1910 there were only 872 permanent residents.

## SKAGWAY : ARCHITECTURE AND TOWNSCAPES

In his research report on the architectural history of Skagway, Robert L. Spude (1983, p. 47) describes the town as "one of the best preserved examples of turn-of-the-century architecture in the far northwest". He identifies four significant periods of building activity : pioneer tent city (1887-1897), gold rush boom town (autumn 1897-spring 1899), mature railroad town (1899-1905), and tourist town (1905 to the present). Little has survived from the first period, and much of what has been constructed in more recent times is of limited interest. However, there is a rich legacy from the second and third periods. The frame structures with false fronts which line lower Broadway date largely from the second period and continue to house stores and other commercial outlets. False fronts were typical of the commercial sectors of many American frontier communities and were generally intended to create an impression of height, volume

## SKAGWAY : EVOLUTION OF POPULATION, 1897-1989



and substance where such attributes were lacking. The beginning of the third period coincides with the establishment of scheduled steamer service from the Puget Sound cities. Tools and building materials were now more readily available, skilled craftsmen and architects set up shop in town, and sturdier buildings, churches and fine residences were the consequence.

The *Skagway Historic District*, now largely commercial, extends along and back of Broadway between Second and Seventh avenues. An examination of vintage photographs shows that a number of storefronts have scarcely changed in appearance since the turn of the century. In a few cases, the names of the establishments are the same as they were during the gold rush, and until recently one or two stores were being managed by descendants of the original owners. Close to the foot of Broadway is the former administrative headquarters of the WP&YR (the *Railroad Building*, erected in 1900), and next to it is the old railway depot. Both buildings were donated to the U.S. National Park Service for restoration within its Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, established in 1976; the first now houses the National Park Service administration, and the second serves as a visitor centre. The Park Service has restored a number of other buildings on lower Broadway (the Pacific Clipper Line office, Verbaudhede's Cigar Store and Confectionery, the Mascot Saloon, etc.), and five of these are presently being used for commercial purposes. Lower Broadway has been the principal commercial thoroughfare of Skagway from the town's beginnings, in part because the roadbed of the WP&YR was constructed down the centre of it in June, 1898, but also because substantial buildings such as the Golden North Hotel and the Trail Inn/Pack Train bar were moved to Broadway from other streets in the early twentieth century. It was not until the early 1950s that the tracks along Broadway were torn up; from then on, rail traffic was routed along the second roadbed, which runs along the foot of the bluff on the eastern margin of the town. Broadway is wide, offers ample parking, and is lined by board sidewalks which have been rebuilt both as a tourist attraction and a colourful reminder of the town's past.

In the early days of the gold rush, Skagway attracted more than its share of confidence men, professional gamblers, and others who preyed on the thousands of goldseekers passing through the town. The most notorious of these was Jefferson Randolph (*Soapy*) Smith, who, with his followers, controlled most of the illicit activity in the town until he was shot to death on the Skagway docks on July 8, 1898. Time has proved this to be the most memorable event in Skagway's 90-odd years of history. Consequently, it has been related and re-inacted on countless occasions for the benefit of the thousands of tourists who have visited the town. In her minor classic *I married the Klondike*, Laura Berton describes the cult of Soapy Smith as it existed in Skagway in 1925:

"Skagway had ceased to be the drab little town I had seen on my first trip north. Now it was a village dedicated entirely to preserving the memory of the town's leading moneymaker, the late Jefferson R. Smith, better known as *Soapy*. In his lifetime, Soapy Smith, a confidence man from Denver, had gouged the Skagway visitors mercilessly... Now the citizens of Skagway were gouging the visitors in his name. Smith had operated a bar in which his luckless victims were fleeced. Now there was a bar containing life-sized dummies of Smith, where the tourists were fleeced at fifty cents admission each. There was also Soapy Smith's grave, well protected by wire mesh from souvenir hunters, and Soapy Smith's regularly freshened bloodstain on the wharf, to mark the spot where he had been shot to death by a vigilante named Frank Reid (there was no wire mesh on Reid's grave because nobody wanted a souvenir of it). There were postcards for sale showing Soapy Smith on a white horse, and other postcards showing him dying on a white cot. There was a giant painting of his skull on the cliffs above the town, grinning down at the passers-by, so that it was impossible not to be

aware of this desperado for a single moment of one's stay in Skagway. He was, indeed, Skagway's leading industry. Nay, he was her only one" (Berton, 1977, p. 170-171).

Even today, Soapy Smith remains a powerful tourist attraction in Skagway. For more than half a century, the Eagles Hall at Broadway and Sixth Avenue has been the locale of the longest running summer show in the North, *Skagway in the Days of '98*, which focuses on the highlights of the gold rush and the rise and fall of Skagway's notorious confidence man. On heavy cruise ship days, there are often three or four performances each day. It is obvious that, at least in summer, Skagway continues to live and also to thrive on its memories.

Since Skagway's early years, the principal residential quarter has been on the northwest side of town, along Alaska and Main streets and the avenues which cross them. Because building lots were relatively small, many of the first houses were of modest dimensions. Those which have survived from this period are generally well-maintained and attractively landscaped. Much of the building stock here obviously dates from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many somewhat larger homes were probably built using standard sets of plans purchased from American architects or builders, for houses similar in all respects can be found in West Coast American cities and in Vancouver. Sharply-pitched gabled roofs, bay windows, verandahs, off-centre entrances, and rustic picket fences are all found in Skagway and were all typical of houses of this period. Victorian Gothic and Queen Anne styles are fairly common, but "some residences mix features from so many different styles that they are best classified simply as Victorian *mélange*" (Spude, 1983, p. 62).

Almost all of the early houses of Skagway were built of wood, an inexpensive and easily-obtained commodity along the Pacific Coast in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The lumber was either obtained locally or was brought in by steamer from the Puget Sound cities and Vancouver. Wooden trimmings, either machine- or hand-made, were used for decoration. The architectural style, the ornamentation, and the narrowness of the lots all contributed to a sense of height, then considered a desirable trait in a house.

Because of the dramatic decline in Skagway's population (from 10 000 in 1898 to 3 117 in 1900, then to 1 800 in 1902, 872 in 1910 and 600 in 1912), the housing density in the residential district is obviously not nearly as great as it was at the turn of the century. Houses which have burned down, fallen down, or been moved have not been replaced. As a consequence, there are many vacant lots, some of which have been acquired by next-door neighbours for gardens or additional living space. There are also a number of abandoned structures, notably along the northeast fringe of the built-up area.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF WHITEHORSE

Whitehorse was established on the west bank of the Yukon River immediately below the three greatest obstacles to navigation along its 2 554 km course: Miles Canyon, Squaw Rapids, and the Whitehorse Rapids. Miles Canyon, 1,1 km long and striking north-south, is a narrow gorge cut deep into sheets of basalt. Its waters were tamed in 1958 as the result of the construction of a power dam a few kilometres downriver, but until then the river raced through the gorge in a dangerous torrent. Immediately downriver from Miles Canyon were the Squaw Rapids, now completely drowned by the impounded waters of the artificial Schwatka Lake. Lieut. Frederick Schwatka, the first white man to descend the Yukon from its source to its mouth (1883),



described the river here as flowing "in a white and shallow sheet over reefs of boulders and bars thickly studded with intertwining drifts of huge timber, ten times more dangerous for a boat or raft than the narrow canyon itself, although perhaps not so in appearance" (Schwatka, 1894, p. 166). Below Squaw Rapids were the Whitehorse Rapids, which have been largely eliminated as a result of the construction of the dam. Here "the river again contracts, hemmed in by low basaltic banks, and becomes even narrower than before [...] making a veritable horseshoe of boiling cascades... Through this tunnel of foam the waves ran three or four feet high, and this fact [...] made matters very uninviting for navigation in any sort of craft" (*Ibid.*).

The Whitehorse Rapids marked the effective head of navigation on the Yukon River; however, the canyon and rapids were never a complete obstacle to small craft moving downriver. A group of prospectors who had arrived via the Chilkoot Pass successfully ran the turbulent waters in 1880 (Friesen, 1981, p. 15), Schwatka's party descended them without major incident three years later, and during the gold rush many hundreds of stampeder *en route* to the creeks of the Klondike floated down them in scows or on rafts. There were, however, many accidents, and a number of lives were lost. Even before Schwatka's expedition, a series of portages had been laid out alongside the canyon and rapids, and in 1887 the geologist George M. Dawson reported that at the south end of Miles Canyon "a sort of extemporized windlass has been rigged up by the miners for the purpose of hauling up their boats" (Dawson, 1887, p. 161). In the spring of 1898, at the height of the gold rush, Norman Macauley constructed a tramway (the Canyon and White Horse Tramway Co.) along the east side of the river between the head of the canyon and the foot of the Whitehorse Rapids. It consisted "of peeled logs, eight inches in diameter, over which horses pulled wagons with cast-iron concave wheels" (Bennett, 1978, p. 35). The tramway functioned from 1898 to 1900, allowing the transport of freight and passengers as well as small boats. Settlements sprang up at both ends of it to service river travellers: Canyon City, 1.5 km upriver from Miles Canyon, and White Horse City, about the same distance below the Whitehorse Rapids and directly across the river from the present-day S.S. Klondike National Historic Site. The settlements and the tramway disappeared forever in 1900, the year the White Pass and Yukon Route railway was finally completed from the Alaskan coast to the new settlement of Whitehorse on the opposite bank of the river.

The town of Whitehorse was not laid out until October of 1899; until then, the site had been vacant. The newly surveyed townsite was first named Closeleigh in honour of the financiers of the railway. Shortly after, its name was changed to White Horse and finally, in 1957, to Whitehorse. During the winter of 1899-1900, a number of buildings at White Horse City were hauled across the frozen river to the new townsite. However, a photograph of Whitehorse taken in the spring of 1900 (Yukon Historical and Museums Association, 1983, p. 3) shows that many of the first residents of the town spent at least their first few months here lodged in tents. Through rail service between Skagway and Whitehorse began on July 30, 1900. Whitehorse thrived in its role as a transshipment and supply centre, and an important boat-building industry also developed here. A description of the town which appeared in the May 1, 1901, edition of the *White Horse Star* gives an idea of how quickly Whitehorse grew following the arrival of the railway:

"A diminutive yet bustling city of nearly 2 000 pop., with a half dozen big wholesale houses and retail merchandise establishments, a score or more of retail stores, one exclusive hardware store, six large hotels and an equal number of small ones, two big meat and provision companies, half a dozen restaurants, two drug stores, one bank, immense brickyards, 2 000 feet of warehouses on the water front, a handsome depot, three churches, an athletic club with its own building and gymnasium, an electric light plant, government barracks for

the accommodation of 200 mounted police, two newspapers and hundreds of pretty and permanent homes [...] these are some of the substantial foundation timbers which hold up the building of White Horse, and all of them have been established and buildings erected during the past nine months".

## THE TOWNSITE

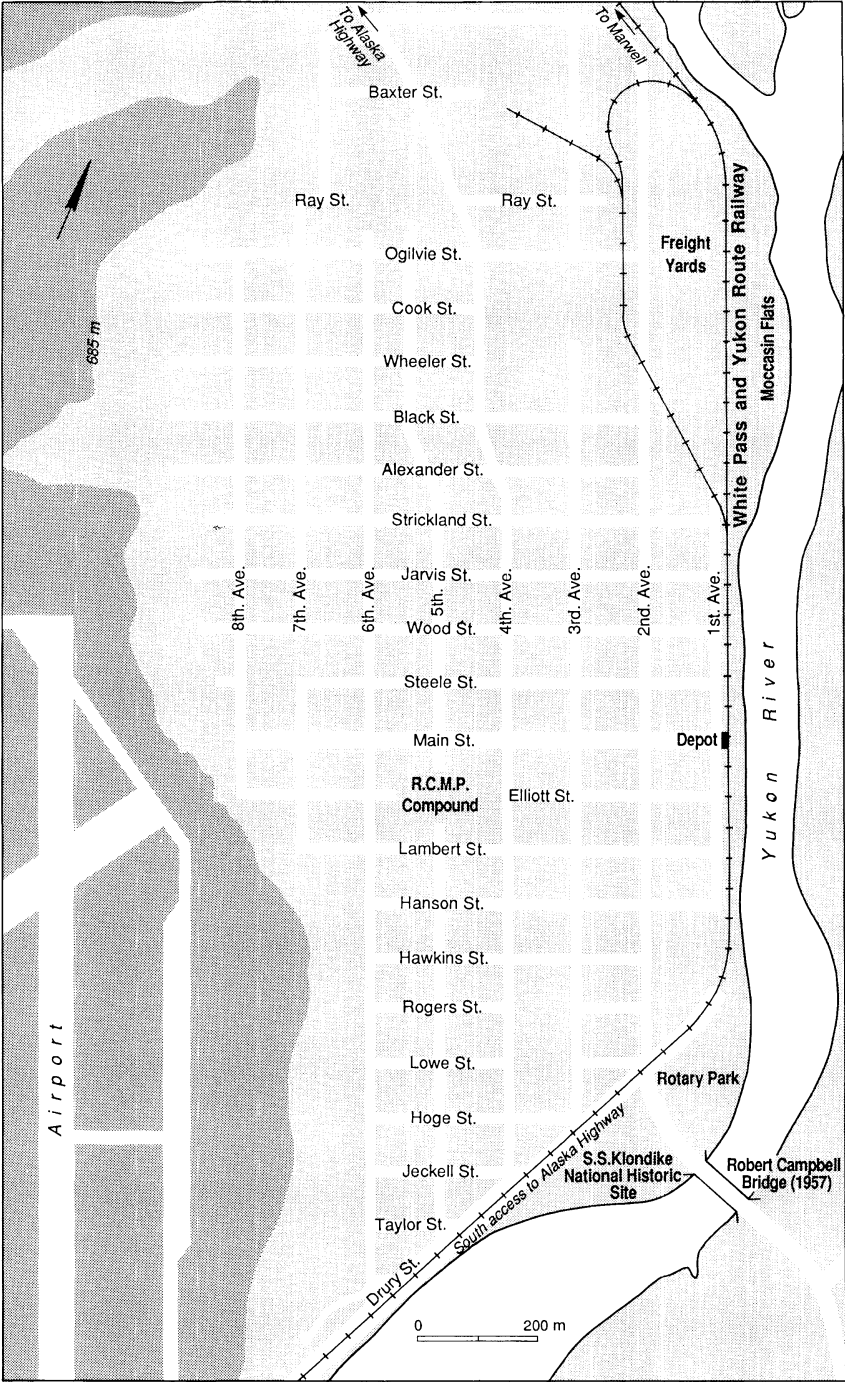
The site selected by the White Pass company for the establishment of the town of Whitehorse was unattractive : a featureless, partially-treed gravel flat on the west bank of the Yukon River standing only a few metres above high water level (figure 5). The lowest-lying areas were marshy and had a cover of scrub willows or of grass. The soil cover was thin, so residents who wished to start gardens had to haul in earth from elsewhere. The townsite ranged in width from 500 to 1 000 metres. It backed onto the so-called Whitehorse Escarpment, a steep and, in places, subvertical bluff 55 m high composed of glaciolacustrine silts capped by sands. There is a similar escarpment on the east bank of the river, and both are subject to rill erosion, gullyng and slumping.

In 1899, a Dominion Land Surveyor laid out nineteen lots on the river flat and two additional lots on the marshy islands immediately adjacent to it. Seventeen of the lots were 16,2 ha (40 acres) in area, but not all were symmetrical because of the sinuous nature of the river and the configuration of the escarpment. The four remaining lots (including the two island lots) were considerably smaller ; for example, the lot contained between First Avenue and the river and presently known as Moccasin Flats occupied only 2,4 ha. All in all, the surveyed lots, which extended from present-day Hawkins Street north to and including the Marwell Industrial Area, comprised 262,3 ha. The Federal government retained 36,4 ha in the Marwell area for its own purposes, but, not surprisingly, the rest of the surveyed land (225,9 ha) was acquired by the White Pass company. On March 3, 1900, patents for the lots were issued to intermediaries who then transferred their interests either to Samuel H. Graves, President of the WP&YR, or to the British Yukon Railway Company, one of its Canadian subsidiaries. White Pass also acquired additional land for its operations on the outskirts of the town (118,3 ha according to Koroscil, 1988, p. 279) as well as a right of way on the east side of First Avenue for its railway roadbed.

The southern part of the river flat, considerably better drained than the northern half, was selected as the site for the railway depot and for the new settlement of Whitehorse. The task of developing the town was entrusted to another White Pass subsidiary, the British Yukon Land Company, incorporated in late 1900 and which functioned as the real estate arm of the parent company. Lots 1, 2, 3 and 4, located immediately back of the depot and comprising 65 ha, would constitute the heart of the new settlement. The company subdivided the land contained within these four lots using a conventional grid plan. The lots were first broken down into blocks measuring 67 m  $\times$  91,5 m (220'  $\times$  300') ; the latter were then subdivided into building lots measuring 15,2 m by 30,5 m (50'  $\times$  100'). Most of the building lots laid out between First and Second avenues were even smaller, measuring only 9,1 m  $\times$  30,5 m (30'  $\times$  100'). There was nevertheless a lively real estate market, and in the early years of the town lots in good business locations sold for greatly inflated prices (MacBride, 1956, p. 30). The company retained much of the land fronting on the river for its own purposes, specifically for railway yards, docks, warehouses, and a boatyard ; in addition, it leased the narrow strip of land contained between First Avenue and the river from the Federal government, eventually acquiring it outright in 1960 in a land swap. Much of the

Figure 5

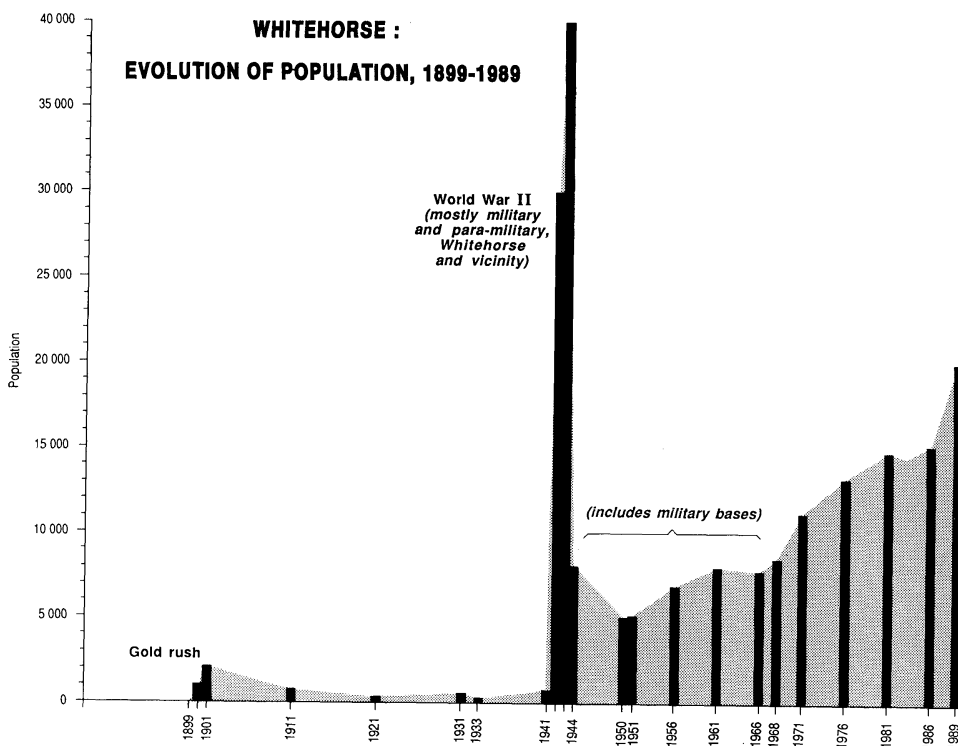
**WHITEHORSE : THE TOWNSITE**



riverfront still belongs to the White Pass Corporation, and, surprisingly, it was not until the 1950s that ownership of the city streets was transferred from the British Yukon Railway Company to the municipal administration.

Only a handful of the structures erected in the early days of Whitehorse have survived. Turn-of-the-century photographs show that many of the first buildings and homes were made of logs, canvas, or combinations of the two. Most of these structures were crude and were quickly improved or replaced. A few, however, were built to last and have survived until this day, notably the Anglican Church (1900), an associated rectory (1901), and the former Government Telegraph Office (1900), all constructed of logs; the latter structure still occupies its original site on First Avenue but is now a component of the MacBride Museum.

The first frame buildings were erected as soon as dimensional lumber became available. Two- and three-storey commercial buildings faced with clapboard, many with elaborate false fronts, quickly sprang up along the two major arteries of the town, that is, First Avenue and Main Street. At that time, First Avenue was the more important of the two. Oriented north-south, it stood 40 m back of Whitehorse's waterfront and was only a few paces from the WP&YR roadbed, which it paralleled. Main Street ran east-west from First Avenue to the back of the townsite. The commodious WP&YR railway depot, the functional heart of the town and which doubled as a passenger and freight office for the sternwheeler service, stood at the junction of the two streets. The extensive warehouse facilities of the British Yukon Navigation Company, yet another offshoot of the White Pass company, were located between First Avenue and the river, neatly flanking the depot. On the west side of First Avenue there were wholesale and



retail establishments, a handful of modest public buildings, and various hotels and cafés, notably in the two or three blocks on either side of the depot. The lower part of Main Street was primarily devoted to retail trade (stores, cafés, hotels, etc.).

## WHITEHORSE: INLAND PORT

In 1866, one year before the purchase of Alaska by the United States, the first steam sternwheeler on the Yukon River began operations. By the time of the great gold discoveries in the Klondike basin (1896), sternwheelers were already providing service between St. Michael on the Bering Sea and Fortymile, Y.T., and occasionally beyond (Wright, 1976, p. 267). In the spring of 1898, service was initiated between Dawson and White Horse City, and connections were established with smaller sternwheelers already operating on the run between Lake Bennett and Miles Canyon. The availability of steamer service below the Whitehorse Rapids was one of the factors which led the WP&YR to establish its inland rail terminus at Whitehorse instead of at the more northerly settlement of Fort Selkirk as originally planned.

The Yukon River is shallow throughout much of its length, the consequence of a semi-arid climate. Its course is dashed by shallows and shoals, many of which are constantly shifting. The navigable channel is narrow. The sections of the river which are glacially-fed reach their highwater marks later than those which are primarily nourished by snowmelt (Denis, p. 164). The river is fast-flowing, and the many sharp turns are negotiated with difficulty. For all these reasons, navigation was always difficult along the Yukon, particularly along the upper river, that is, above Dawson. The river nevertheless provided "an inland waterway through the heart of Alaska and the Yukon, the only fissure in an otherwise impregnable land mass" (Bennett, 1978, p. 62). And the sternwheeler represented "a clever answer to the main problem posed by the Yukon River, namely the necessity of transporting heavy cargoes over shallow water" (Weppler, 1968, p. 2).

The sternwheeler was more or less flat-bottomed and could operate in little more than a metre of water even when loaded. It was of narrower beam than the sidewheeler, which was in common use along broad rivers such as the Mississippi, and was therefore well adapted to the narrow channels of the Yukon. The stern-mounted paddle wheel gave the vessel tremendous backing power, allowing it to pull itself off sandbanks and shoals. This backing power could also be used to help negotiate sharp turns and to reduce speed on the downriver trips. For these reasons, the steamer sternwheeler was used along the Yukon River and its principal tributaries, to the virtual exclusion of other types of craft, until commercial navigation here ceased in the mid-1950s.

In 1900, the White Pass company created a river division, the British Yukon Navigation Company, and charged it with the establishment of a sternwheeler service on the upper Yukon River to complement the just completed railway. During the winter of 1900-1901, the company built a boatyard on Moccasin Flats at the northern end of the townsite in order to construct its sternwheeler fleet. Over the next few months the company bought out its principal competitors, and, by 1903, it had established almost complete hegemony over passenger and freight traffic on the upper river and lakes. An often reproduced photograph of the Whitehorse waterfront taken in 1901 (Bennett, 1978, p. 65) underlines the importance of the river at that time as a means of transportation: it shows eight sternwheelers on the Yukon River between Moccasin Flats and the Whitehorse docks and a ninth on the ways of the shipyard.

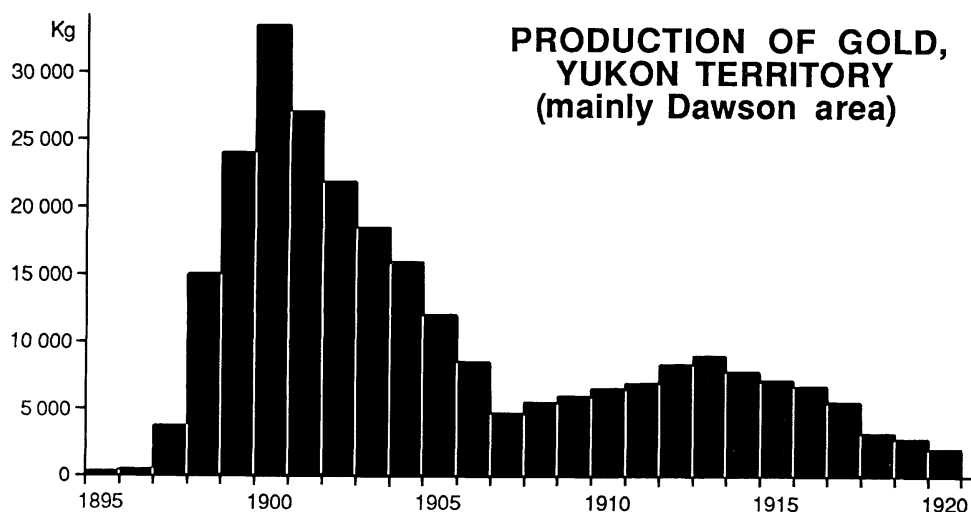
## DECLINE OF THE YUKON AND OF WHITEHORSE

In 1900, about 33 500 kg of gold (more than a million fine ounces) were washed from the placer deposits of the Yukon Territory, mainly in the Dawson area. This was the high point in the history of gold mining in the Territory. By 1902, gold production had fallen to 21 800 kg and, by 1904, to 15 800 kg (figure 6). This period of declining production was marked by the consolidation of claims and the increased mechanization of mining operations. In 1905, dredges were introduced on a large scale in the Klondike basin, an indication that the most profitable placers were close to exhaustion. Henceforth, dredging and hydraulic operations would dominate on the creeks, resulting in a further decline in the demand for labour. Between 1906 and 1918, the average annual production of gold for the Territory was about 6 200 kg. In 1919, production fell to 2 830 kg (less than 100 000 ounces), and it was not until the 1980s that this level would once again be exceeded.

In 1901, the population of the Yukon was 27 219 (Census of Canada); 80% male, it was overwhelmingly concentrated in the Dawson area. In the years which followed, many miners returned south or moved on to the Alaska gold fields, so that by 1911 the Territory's population had fallen to 8 512. By 1921 it had fallen again, to only 4 157. Throughout this period of steady decline, Whitehorse continued to function as a railway terminus, a river port, and a distribution and supply centre, but on an ever-decreasing scale; the once bustling centre was now a quiet backwater, living by the seasons of the river (Coates and Morrison, 1988, p. 204). A contemporary traveller left this description of the town:

"There is little to say of Whitehorse: it has a barracks of the Northwest Mounted Police, two or three struggling churches, the usual row of shops along the waterfront — and two hotels. The hotels [...] live mainly upon residents of the two territories (i.e., the Yukon and Alaska) going and coming. [Whitehorse offers] conclusive evidence that a railway does not necessarily bring business, and that even the terminus of a railway may be a very dull place" (Hudson Stuck, 1917, p. 18-19).

Figure 6



And yet, during this period of decline, Whitehorse briefly became a mining centre of importance in its own right. As early as 1897, copper had been discovered in the so-called Whitehorse Copper Belt, a zone of copper-bearing skarns 30 km long and 5 km wide located immediately west of the settlement. Between 1908 and 1910, the WP&YR constructed a 16 km spur line into the hills back of MacRae to facilitate the shipment of crude ore from the production sites, the most important of which was the Pueblo Mine. From the Skagway docks, where bunkers were constructed, the ore was shipped to Tacoma for milling and refining. Intensive production of copper began shortly before World War I and greatly increased thereafter, thanks to a favourable world price for the metal. Mining reached a peak here in 1916, when 1 270 tonnes of copper were produced; in 1918, 18% of the labour force of Whitehorse was engaged in mining. However, when the war ended, the world price for copper collapsed, and by 1920 all of the mines had closed.

During the period between the World Wars, the fortunes of the Yukon and of Whitehorse continued to decline. The population of the Territory stood at about 4 200 throughout most of this period, of whom about 2 500 were whites. There were now fewer than a thousand people in the town of Dawson, and the mining camps on the nearby creeks, once so numerous, were either dying or had disappeared. Whitehorse was also stagnating. By the mid-1930s, there were no more than 400 permanent (i.e., winter) residents, and building lots were selling for 25,00\$. The WP&YR was also suffering. Because of the lack of economic activity in the Territory, the volume of freight carried by the railway and the sternwheelers had greatly diminished. The company was no longer profitable; it had ceased to pay dividends on its common stock in 1912 and was now no longer paying interest on its debentures. The roadbed had been allowed to deteriorate, and the rolling stock was wearing out: between 1917 and 1938, not a single new locomotive was acquired. At the outbreak of war in the Pacific, the WP&YR owned "less than a dozen working steam engines. Only two of these were new; the others were all more than thirty years of age" (Martin, 1974, p. 55). However, the company survived because of shipments to tidewater of silver-lead concentrates from mines in the Mayo district and also thanks to a lucrative summer tourist trade. The railway was generally obliged to schedule extra trains over the summer months to accommodate the many visitors; there were up to 3 trains a day in summer as opposed to only 6 per week during the rest of the year. Tourists (mainly Americans) visiting the Yukon and Alaska would normally sail to Skagway by coastal steamer or cruise ship, ride to Whitehorse on the scenic railway, and then embark on White Pass sternwheelers for the leisurely trip downriver to Dawson with connections to Fairbanks. From there, they would take the Alaska Railroad to Anchorage to meet up once again with their ship. The Yukon tourist industry expanded during the 1920s, fell off badly during the Depression years, and disappeared entirely during the war.

In the second half of the 1930s, employment opportunities in the Yukon improved somewhat due to a sharp rise in the price of gold, which triggered the reorganization and expansion of the activities of the Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation, by far the Territory's largest producer. By 1941, the population of the Territory had increased to 4 914, of whom a little more than 3 000 were whites. On the eve of war in the Pacific, the population of Whitehorse stood at 754, its highest level since World War I.

## WORLD WAR II

The war with Japan (1941-1945) had an enormous and totally unforeseen impact on the geography and the economy of the Far Northwest. Here the war years were dominated by great construction projects of a military nature (the *Northwest Defense Projects*), all of which were undertaken or sponsored by the United States Army and paid for largely or in their entirety by the American government. The most important of these was the construction of the 2 451 km Alaska Highway between Dawson Creek, B.C., and Fairbanks, Alaska. The obvious purpose of the highway was to provide emergency road access to the military garrisons of the isolated Territory of Alaska, now of great strategic significance because of the war in the Pacific theatre. A second objective, probably more important than the first (Zaslow, 1988, p. 216), was to provide a road link, as well as a guide path for pilots, between the airfields of the *Northwest Staging Route*, a chain of Canadian airports and intermediate landing strips strung out between Edmonton and Whitehorse and allowing air communications with Fairbanks. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers laid out the road in little more than 8 months (March to November, 1942); however, it was widened and rebuilt over the next few years by American and Canadian contractors under the direction of the U.S. Public Roads Administration. The highway cuts from southeast to northwest across the Yukon, entering it at Watson Lake (the site of one of the airfields) and leaving it near Beaver Creek. Until the completion of the highway, the Territory was virtually inaccessible except by the WP&YR railway; the Army therefore used the line to bring in its troops, heavy equipment, construction material, and most of its supplies. Because of its central location and its position at the head of the railway, Whitehorse emerged as the operational centre of the highway project and its principal distributing point (Bennett, 1978, p. 134).

A second military project of magnitude also impacted heavily on Whitehorse. Because of the war, there was a heavy demand for petroleum products in the Far Northwest, notably for gasoline and aviation fuel; however, it was feared that the transportation of these fuels by coastal tanker to U.S. bases in Alaska might be interrupted by the Japanese (Diubaldo, 1977, p. 179). A local source of supply was therefore required, but the nearest known petroleum was at distant Norman Wells on the Mackenzie River. Between 1942 and 1944, U.S. Army engineers and their civilian contractors laid a 10 cm crude oil pipeline from Norman Wells across the largely unexplored Mackenzie and Selwyn mountains to Whitehorse, a distance of some 930 km (the Canadian Oil or CANOL No. 1 project). Whitehorse was the base for the construction of the western part of the line. A tote road (the CANOL road) was built alongside the pipeline between the Alaska Highway and Norman Wells; indispensable during the construction process, it would later be used to service the pipeline and to provide access to the ten pumping stations. The Standard Oil Company of California erected a 3 000 barrel-a-day refinery at Whitehorse on behalf of the Army, and a 7.6 cm gasoline pipeline was laid along the Alaska Highway between here and Fairbanks (CANOL No. 4). In a separate operation proposed to the Army by Standard Oil (Diubaldo, 1977, p. 193), a 10 cm pipeline was laid along the trace of the WP&YR roadbed between the Skagway docks and Whitehorse (CANOL No. 2). This pipeline, completed in January, 1943, and still in use today, allowed the shipment of petroleum products from the United States directly to its military bases on the Alaska Highway. A 5 cm gasoline pipeline connecting with the Skagway line was laid along the Alaska Highway between Carcross and Watson Lake (CANOL No. 3) but has since been removed.



The task of supplying the Alaska Highway and CANOL projects proved beyond the capacity of the WP&YR. Consequently, the railway was leased to the U.S. government for the duration of the war and at a monthly rent of 27 708\$. The lease took effect on October 1, 1942, and from then until May 1, 1946, the railway was operated, and highly effectively, by the 770<sup>th</sup> Railway Operating Battalion of the Military Railway Service of the U.S. Army. However, to carry out its task the Army was obliged to add substantially to the railway's rolling stock. 1943 was the WP&YR's busiest year, for work was proceeding simultaneously on the various CANOL projects, on improvements to the Alaska Highway, and on the transformation of Whitehorse Airport into a major military installation. Dozens of trains travelled between Skagway and Whitehorse every day, moving a total of about 300 000 tonnes of material during the year (50 000 tonnes in August alone), or roughly ten times the annual average for the pre-war period.

### IMPACT OF THE WAR ON SKAGWAY AND WHITEHORSE

The impact of World War II on Skagway was appreciable but not lasting. Thanks to the arrival of the Railway Battalion, of other troops, and of civilian construction workers, the town's population swelled to about 2 500; the docks and the railway yards were busier and more congested than they had been since the days of the gold rush. Following the war, however, the Army withdrew completely from Skagway, and the population of the town reverted to its pre-war level of about 600. At least 21 U.S. Army buildings have survived from this period, including a garage presently used by Skagway's public works department and a wooden barracks located not far from the old railway depot.

The arrival of the U.S. Army had a much more substantial influence on Whitehorse, which was transformed almost overnight into a major American military base. The process began in March, 1942, with the arrival of the first company of U.S. Army Engineers, "soon followed by hordes of U.S. soldiers and Alaska Highway construction gangs with their machines and supplies" (MacBride, 1956). Headquarters for the project was the sprawling Royal Canadian Mounted Police compound on Fourth Avenue. By June, 1942, the town's population had grown to 30 000, many of whom were U.S. servicemen. The population peaked at roughly 40 000 in 1943, but by the summer of 1944 the major construction projects were more or less finished, and the town's population had fallen to about 8 000 (Taylor, 1945, p. 433).

The arrival of the U.S. Army had a lasting influence on the land use patterns of Whitehorse. At the outbreak of war, the northern, southern and western sections of the townsite were empty. The built-up area, bounded on the north and south by Strickland and Hawkins streets, extended back from the river only as far as Fourth Avenue, and about one third of the lots within this sector were vacant. Between Fourth Avenue and the escarpment there were a few scattered houses as well as a cemetery. Within short order the U.S. Army occupied the balance of the river flat, establishing its storage facilities on the north side of town and tents and barracks for its troops on the south and southwest. The oil refinery was erected in what is now the Marwell Industrial Park, to the north of the townsite, and a railway spur line was constructed to serve it. Although most of the river flat was now fully occupied, the Army required additional space for service facilities, administration, and the accommodation of its personnel. To this end, the Canadian government established a *Military Reserve* for the American forces on top of the Whitehorse Escarpment. The Reserve was roughly 11 km by 3 km, its long axis straddling the Alaska Highway. It contained the greatly-expanded Whitehorse

Airport, a petroleum products tank farm, and two residential and service districts for American military personnel. One of these, later known as Hillcrest, was established on the west side of the Alaska Highway on a low knoll immediately back of the airport. The second (Camp Takhini) was laid out further up the highway, just above the Two Mile Hill Road junction. It housed the headquarters of the Army and was the larger of the two districts.

The sudden explosion of the population and of the built-up area of Whitehorse had a considerable impact on the old town centre, now pinched between sprawling areas of barracks and storehouses. Since 1900, the river and the railroad had provided the most convenient and practical means of access to the settlement. As a consequence, the functional centre of the townsite had long been the intersection of Main Street and First Avenue, in that the White Pass depot, the Whitehorse docks, and the B.Y.N. Co. warehouses were all located here. Now, however, equipment and supplies for the military were being trucked directly to the camps via the Alaska Highway, or were being transferred from White Pass railcars to U.S. Army vehicles at MacRae, a point 13 km south of Whitehorse where rail and road intersected. Also, there was now a good road (Two Mile Hill Road) running up the face of the escarpment from the townsite to the highway. From this time on, road communications would steadily improve in the Whitehorse area, and the dock-and-depot complex at the foot of Main Street would lose its vitality and significance. Over the next two decades the docks and the riverfront warehouses would in fact disappear, and the *centre of town* would gradually shift westward to the intersection of Main Street and Fourth Avenue, from where there was direct road access to the Alaska Highway.

The town's commercial outlets did a flourishing business during the war years. MacBride (1948, p. 64) reported that most Whitehorse stores were sold out most of the time and that there were often three movie shows a night, with a line-up a block long for each show. However, it was not only the storeowners who prospered as a result of the war. Many residents of the townsite converted their homes into boarding houses for the duration; a small log house on Hawkins Street described in *Whitehorse Heritage Buildings* (Yukon Historical and Museums Association, 1983, p. 28) was subdivided into 21 rooms to provide accommodation for U.S. servicemen and civilians. Some new rental housing was also constructed in the townsite at this time, including several two- and three-storey log cabin apartments which have survived to this day to become tourist curiosities.

## POST-WAR ADJUSTMENTS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

Most American servicemen were withdrawn from Whitehorse upon the completion of the Alaska Highway. The CANOL No. 1 pipeline, which only became fully operational on May 5, 1944, was shut down on June 30, 1945. A contractor removed most of the line during the winter of 1947-1948 and shipped the 6.7 m sections south to the United States to be sold as scrap. The refinery was also shut down; later purchased by Imperial Oil, it was dismantled in 1948 and trucked to the Leduc oil field in Alberta. In the spring of 1946, the WP&YR railway was returned to civilian control, and on April 1 of the same year, the Canadian portion of the Alaska Highway was turned over to the Federal government. The departure of the Americans was, however, compensated for by a greatly increased Canadian military presence in the Yukon. The Royal Canadian Air Force assumed responsibility for the Whitehorse Airport, and in the 1950s it moved its personnel and their dependants into the now completely refurbished Hillcrest base

on the Military Reserve. The Canadian Army Engineers were tasked with the management, maintenance and repair of the Canadian section of the Alaska Highway and with the construction of certain tributary roads. In the early 1950s, the Engineers moved into Camp Takhini, which became the new headquarters of the so-called Northwest Highway System. Around this time, the Canadian government established a third residential suburb within the Reserve (Valleyview), primarily to house Department of Transport personnel.

The departure of the Americans had a considerable impact on the economy and the urban landscapes of *Lower Whitehorse*, that is the portion of the agglomeration lying below the escarpment and comprising the townsite and Marwell. By the end of 1945, the population of the townsite had fallen to an estimated 3680 (Lotz, 1961, p. 7) and, by 1951, to 2594 (Census of Canada); it would remain at this level until the late 1950s. The population of the townsite was nevertheless four times greater than it had been before the war. As a result of the evacuation by the U.S. Army, large parcels of land became vacant at the northern and southern ends of the townsite; most of these properties belonged to the British Yukon Navigation Company, the river division of the White Pass company. For a few years, some of this land was used for the storage and maintenance of the vehicles and heavy equipment of the Northwest Highway System. However, other tracts were sold off to permit the expansion of the residential sector, notably on the north side of the townsite between Fourth Avenue and the escarpment. Although the U.S. Army had managed to sell some of its temporary buildings and heavy equipment, it had also abandoned much *in situ*; this treasure-trove of material was quickly appropriated by residents for the building of homes. At that time, the townsite acquired a cachet which it has not yet entirely lost. Pierre Berton described the town (in 1948) as "a cluttered hodgepodge of war-time jerry-building — a wild mélange of tarpaper shacks, outhouses, bunkhouses, Quonset huts, corrugated iron lean-tos, false-fronted frame structures, log cabins from an earlier day, a few trim bungalows, and a few square blockhouses disguised by imitation brick — all mingled with piles of salvaged lumber and piping, rusted hulks of trucks and bulldozers, and scattered heaps of oil drums" (Berton, 1961, p. 99). Over the years the detritus of war has largely been removed from the river flat, but the architectural clutter described by Berton has survived, notably in the residential districts which sprang up immediately following the war.

Other elements of the military legacy, however, were positive and enduring. Thanks to the war, Whitehorse had replaced the decaying gold rush town of Dawson as the major centre of the Territory. It now enjoyed road communications with the south (in contrast, until 1955 Dawson was only accessible by road from Alaska), and it would soon become a major truck and tourist stop along the Alaska Highway. It had also inherited a modern military airport which was now handling increasing volumes of civilian traffic, including regularly scheduled flights from Vancouver and Edmonton. In 1950, Whitehorse was incorporated as a city, and in the following year the Canadian government officially recognized the primacy of Whitehorse by naming it the new capital of the Yukon, thereby displacing Dawson. However, it was not until 1953 that the seat of government was actually moved to Whitehorse. A three-storey office complex, the Federal Building, was constructed on the north side of Main Street between Third and Fourth avenues to house the Federal and Territorial governments. This marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of Whitehorse, that is, the transformation of a company town and military base into a regional centre of civil administration. This aspect of the recent evolution of Whitehorse is beyond the scope of this paper but has been dealt with in detail in other publications (Koroscil, 1978; Coates and Morrison, 1988; Clibbon, 1989).

## MODERNIZATION OF THE WP&YR

When the White Pass and Yukon Route railway was returned to civilian control in May, 1946, it was worn out, in "tumbledown condition", and the company was "very near to the end" (White Pass officials, quoted in Bennett, 1978, p. 145). However, thanks to a refinancing from London in 1951, the company (now known as the White Pass and Yukon Corporation Ltd.) was reorganized and restructured; at the same time its head office was moved to Canada, first to Vancouver and later to Whitehorse. A complete overhaul of the company's operations began in 1953. The principal elements of this modernization program included the laying down of heavier rail, the purchase of new rolling stock and the *dieselization* of operations, the commissioning of container transports for the Vancouver-Skagway run and the introduction of *containerization* throughout the system, the construction of a new terminal in North Vancouver and (later) of a bulk storage and loading terminal in Skagway, and the expansion of the company's highway trucking division and its integration with the rail service. Earlier, it had been decided to scrap the now unprofitable sternwheeler service on the Yukon River, because post-war extensions to the Territorial road network, notably roads to Mayo (1950) and to Dawson (1955), had rendered river transportation redundant. One by one the huge sternwheelers were beached and abandoned. The B.Y.N. Co.'s boatyard at Whitehorse closed, and the riverfront storage sheds and docks were dismantled; now only their pilings remain. The S.S. *Klondike No. 2*, the last sternwheeler on the river, was retired in August, 1955, after spending the last two years of her working life as a cruise ship on the Whitehorse-Dawson run (the vessel has since been restored as a National Historic Site), and there has been no commercial navigation on the upper river since that time.

All of these changes had their impact on land use patterns in the two communities, but notably in Whitehorse. The new White Pass container terminal was established at the northeast end of town, on a large tract of company land immediately back of Moccasin Flats. However, in order to free this land for development, a significant number of Indians and squatters had to be displaced. Around the same time, the operations of the Northwest Highway System were moved from the townsite to Camp Takhini, freeing additional company land for redevelopment.

Until the closing of the railway in 1982, freight for the north was generally *containerized* at the White Pass terminal in North Vancouver and dispatched by White Pass container-tanker vessel (either the *M.V. Frank H. Brown* or the *M.V. Klondike*) to Skagway. Here it was loaded onto flatcars and hauled directly to Whitehorse, where some *decontainerization* took place. Distribution of goods and of containers within the Territory was by truck. Gasoline and aviation fuel were generally transported to Whitehorse by railway tank car, and the old CANOL No. 2 pipeline between Skagway and Whitehorse was used for the throughput of diesel fuel and heating oil. Outgoing shipments from Whitehorse consisted largely of metal concentrates (lead-zinc from Faro, silver-lead-zinc from Elsa, copper from Whitehorse) and bales of asbestos fibre from Cassiar, B.C., and, until 1979, from Clinton Creek, Y.T. These products were generally containerized at the minesites, trucked to Whitehorse, and loaded onto flatcars for delivery to Skagway. Until the 1950s, the flow of goods and materials was primarily one way, that is, *into* the Territory. However, during the mid-1950s the flow began to reverse itself, thanks to the expansion of the regional hardrock mining industry, and by the late 1970s northbound shipments represented only about one-fifth of the total tonnage handled by White Pass. By this time, the railway was carrying about twice as much tonnage as it had during the busiest years of the war. In 1981, its last full

year of operations, White Pass carried 458 000 tonnes of mineral concentrates (all southbound), 76 900 tonnes of freight (mostly northbound), 49 000 tonnes of petroleum products (all northbound), and 55 000 passengers, most of whom were tourists (Canadian Transport Commission, 1983, p. 26).

## OPENING OF THE SOUTH KLONDIKE HIGHWAY

In retrospect, it was the completion of the South Klondike Highway in 1979 which marked the beginning of the end for the WP&YR railway. Arguably, the road was not intended to supplant the railway but rather to "facilitate local traffic and to encourage tourism"; at the same time it would "provide a competitive means of shipping general freight between Skagway and Whitehorse" (Canadian Transport Commission, 1983, p. 85). The road was not designed to accommodate heavy vehicles; also, for the first seven years of its existence (i.e., until 1986) the Carcross-to-Skagway section of the road was closed between late October and early May. The road nevertheless impacted heavily on certain aspects of the WP&YR operation and notably on passenger ticket sales. The Pacific Coast was now little more than a two hour drive from Whitehorse, and along the way was some of the Territory's most spectacular scenery; Yukoners quickly took to making the trip by car rather than by train. Bus service was initiated between Whitehorse and Skagway, competing directly with the WP&YR for its cruise ship clientele. Users of the Alaska Marine Highway System could now drive their cars and campers from the Skagway ferry terminus directly to Whitehorse instead of loading them onto White Pass flatcars for the laborious trip over the mountains; for such travellers the road was a particular convenience. As a consequence of all of the above, the volume of railway ticket sales plummeted; according to the Yukon Bureau of Statistics, the number of persons entering the Territory by rail (tourists, other visitors, returning Yukon residents) fell by more than half between 1978 and 1980.

## THE CYPRUS ANVIL MINE AND THE CLOSING OF THE RAILWAY

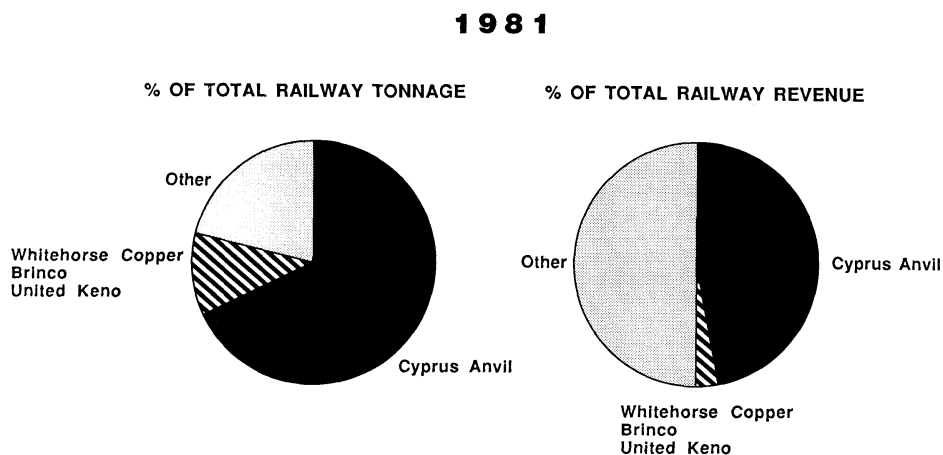
In 1969, a rich lead-zinc-silver deposit (the Cyprus Anvil mine) was brought into production at Faro, 356 road km northeast of Whitehorse, and a mill was erected close to the minesite to allow the production of concentrates. The WP&YR contracted with Cyprus Anvil to move these concentrates to Skagway, from where they would be shipped to Japan. This contract resulted in the introduction to the White Pass system of parabolic or *tear-drop* containers made of steel or aluminum and designed for easy dumping under all weather conditions; each had a capacity of 33 tonnes of metal concentrate. Heavy duty White Pass tractor-trailer units hauled the loaded containers by road from Faro to a road-rail transshipment area (Utah Junction) on the Alaska Highway 10 km south of the city centre. Here a travelling gantry was used to transfer the containers to railway flatcars, which specially-commissioned 1 200 HP diesel locomotives then hauled directly to Skagway. Two hundred such flatcars were placed in service in 1969 to fulfill this contract as well as 280 *tear-drop* containers. The cantilever bridge across Dead Horse Gulch was replaced by a shorter and stronger bridge-tunnel complex in order to accommodate the new locomotives and heavier tonnage. Finally, White Pass constructed a modern bulk storage and loading terminal on the Skagway waterfront, primarily to handle Cyprus Anvil ore.

During the 1970s, Cyprus Anvil accounted for about 13% to 15% of Canadian lead and zinc production and 3% of world production. By far the Yukon's largest mine, it

quickly became the cornerstone of the Territorial economy; in 1981, an estimated 12.4% of all Yukon government revenue was derived from Cyprus Anvil (Canadian Transport Commission, 1983, p. 8). In addition, the mine was now the railway's largest customer. In the last full year of operation of the WP&YR (1981), Cyprus Anvil concentrates represented 68% of total railway tonnage and 47% of total railway revenue (figure 7).

The Cyprus Anvil mine closed in June, 1982, primarily because of depressed metal prices and high operating losses; its new owner, the fast-crumbling Dome Petroleum corporation, even more hard-pressed, was unable to provide assistance. During the same year, a copper mine just south of Whitehorse (Whitehorse Copper Mines, owned by Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Ltd.) closed permanently due to exhaustion of the

**Figure 7**



ore body, Brinco's asbestos mine at nearby Cassiar, B.C., closed temporarily because of poor market conditions for its product, and United Keno Hill's silver-lead mines at Elsa were shut down for the same reason. Whitehorse Copper, Brinco, and United Keno had also used the WP&YR as their carrier and together accounted for almost 11 % of the railway's tonnage and 4 % of its revenues in 1981. This simultaneous collapse of all of the elements of the regional hardrock mining industry, and the loss of most of the WP&YR's major customers, resulted in the shutdown of the railway on October 8, 1982, shortly after the close of the summer tourist season. Although the Cyprus Anvil mine was reopened under new ownership (Curragh Resources Ltd.) in 1986, its concentrates are now being trucked to Skagway (along the greatly improved South Klondike Highway); the carrier is Yukon-Alaska Transport Ltd., which is not connected with the White Pass Corporation. It seems unlikely that White Pass will ever again use the railway to haul ore, for the company recently sold all of its tear-drop containers to authorities engaged in the clean-up of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in Alaska, and certain other elements of its rolling stock are also for sale.

#### IMPACT OF THE CLOSING OF THE RAILWAY ON SKAGWAY

The closing of the WP&YR was a major blow for Skagway, where 65 % to 70 % of the railway's employees were located. Although the head office of the railway was in Whitehorse, most of the day-to-day operations were conducted from Skagway. The car and locomotive maintenance facilities (the Skagway shops) had been located here since the earliest days of the railway, and there were also port and terminalling facilities, a tank farm, and a passenger station. All in all, the railway employed about 100 Skagway residents on a full-time basis during the winter months and about 125 during the summer (Canadian Transport Commission, 1983, p. 36). The impact on the town of the sudden loss of such a payroll was appreciable. To compound the problem, the salaries paid by White Pass in Skagway were considerably higher than those paid in Whitehorse because of favourable labour contracts successfully negotiated by American unions.

The second pillar of Skagway's economy was summer tourism. Even now, most visitors to Skagway arrive by cruise ship or by scheduled ferry service; as a consequence, when there are no vessels in port, there are few tourists in town. However, the daily train from Whitehorse also brought tourists to Skagway, as has (since 1979) the South Klondike Highway. The city is well-equipped to receive visitors. Lower Broadway is lined with curio shops, eateries, and other commercial outlets, most of which are housed in brightly-painted, turn-of-the-century frame buildings which have been carefully restored either by their owners or by the National Park Service. There is also ample overnight accommodation. The modern Westmark Inn on Third Avenue, by far the largest hotel in town, caters mainly to the cruise ship and package tour trade. The three-storey Golden North Hotel, at the corner of Broadway and Third Avenue, appeals to the visitor seeking a more authentic atmosphere. One of Skagway's best-known landmarks because of its striking golden dome, the hotel has operated more or less continuously since 1908 when the building was moved to its present location. The rambling Skagway Inn near Seventh Avenue dates from the post-World War I days of Skagway and offers a frontier-type atmosphere similar to that of the Golden North. Mention has already been made of some of the other tourist attractions of the town, including cabaret shows for cruise ship passengers and the now completely restored railway building and depot at the foot of Broadway. In short, much has been done by government and by local business interests to promote Skagway as a tourist attraction.

Arguably, however, the town's greatest attraction was the WP&YR railway because of its "historic significance, spectacular route, and the unique transportation provided"; also, the railroad was "a significant factor in sustaining the growth in tourism to Alaska and the Yukon, and directly influences the economy of Southeast Alaska by attracting visitors to the region" (Resolution of the United for Skagway Committee, in Canadian Transport Commission, 1983, p. 49). Despite competition from the bus companies, the WP&YR carried about 55 000 passengers (mostly tourists) in both 1981 and 1982, earning about 2.8\$ million in passenger revenue in each of these years. Almost all of these passengers would necessarily have passed through Skagway and contributed in one form or another to the town's tourist economy. The closing of the railway could therefore only have been viewed negatively by those who had invested in Skagway's future as a tourist centre.

To date, however, Skagway's tourist economy does not appear to have been unduly affected by the closing of the railway. Because of its history, architecture, and atmosphere, the town is an important tourist attraction in itself. The number of cruise ship passengers visiting Skagway has increased dramatically since the early 1980s, reaching an all-time high of 128 000 in 1988 (as opposed to 48 000 in 1983). There is now good bus service along the South Klondike Highway for cruise ship passengers wishing to visit Whitehorse and other points in the Yukon, as well as scheduled return air service to Juneau and to Haines. And, in 1988, twice daily round-trip summer rail excursions (late May to mid-September) were re-established along the White Pass route between Skagway (Mile 0) and White Pass Summit (Mile 20), using White Pass diesel locomotives and turn-of-the-century parlour cars; this section of the line, entirely located in Alaska, is considered the most scenic. In 1989, the service was extended as far as Fraser, B.C. (Mile 28), with a motorcoach connection to Whitehorse. The service is popular and, presumably, profitable; there were 36 000 passengers in 1988 and 77 000 in 1989. As a consequence of all of the above, Skagway should continue to attract large numbers of summer visitors, and the town will remain on the itinerary of most cruise ships sailing Alaska's Inside Passage.

## THE IMPACT ON WHITEHORSE

The closing of the WP&YR was the direct consequence of an even more severe blow, that is, the simultaneous collapse of virtually all of the elements of the hardrock mining industry of the Yukon and of northwestern British Columbia, and notably of the Cyprus Anvil mine at Faro. As a consequence of the various shutdowns, many jobs were lost in the Whitehorse area. The White Pass Corporation laid off trainmen, railway maintenance men, tractor-trailer drivers, and some supervisory personnel; the jobs of many of the Whitehorse-based employees of the Cyprus Anvil, Brinco, and United Keno Hill companies also disappeared; and all 200 employees of the now defunct Whitehorse Copper Mines were terminated. Around the same time, the ill-fated Alaska Highway natural gas pipeline project was postponed indefinitely, and those companies and agencies which had been involved withdrew most of their personnel from their Whitehorse offices. The number of housing starts in the city declined dramatically, and the opening of a large new Territorial residential subdivision on top of the escarpment was delayed. At this point, the populations of Whitehorse and of the Territory actually began to decline. It was not until 1986, when economic conditions in the Yukon improved, that the city began to grow once again.



The twin pillars of the economy of Whitehorse, that is government employment and tourism, were nevertheless affected only marginally by the events of the early 1980s. The expansion of the public sector (specifically, of the Territorial civil service) continued until the second quarter of 1982 and only stopped when the full effects of the recession began to be felt. When the worst of the recession was over, hiring began once again. In 1981, there were 3 631 full-time Federal, Territorial and municipal employees in the Territory, an all-time high for public sector employment here up to that point. By 1988, the total had risen to 3 954, for an increase of about 9% over the seven year period. About 65% of the Yukon's public sector employees are located in Whitehorse, including all of those occupying the most senior positions.

Contrary to expectations, Whitehorse's tourist industry does not appear to have been adversely affected by the closing of the railway. Charter bus service between Skagway and Whitehorse was initiated in 1979, the year of the opening of the South Klondike Highway, and competed with the railway until 1982. In 1983, additional bus service was provided in order to accommodate the thousands of package tour purchasers who had already been booked to Whitehorse on the railway. Today there is scheduled daily motorcoach service between Whitehorse and Skagway as well as charter service. Between June and September of 1987, a total of 36 460 non-residents (mostly cruise ship and ferry passengers) entered the Yukon Territory by motorcoach from Skagway, and another 33 000 non-residents drove their own vehicles into the Territory along the same road (Yukon Economic Forecast, Jan. 1989, p. 17). It is assumed that most of these 70 000-odd visitors would have continued on to Whitehorse. It seems likely, then, that there are now about as many tourists coming to Whitehorse from Skagway as there were when the railway was fully operational.

For many years, however, the majority of visitors to Whitehorse have not arrived via Skagway but rather by the now greatly-improved Alaska Highway. A special Yukon Government visitor exit survey showed that about 200 000 tourists (largely Americans) visited the Territory in 1987 and that 93% of these came by road (by car, camper, recreational vehicle or bus). Of course, not all of these visitors would have arrived via the Alaska Highway. Other routes to the Yukon include the all-weather roads from Haines (Alaska) and from Skagway (both of these communities are served by the Alaska Marine Highway System, whose ferries accept vehicles); the *Top of the World Highway* from Tetlin Junction, Alaska, to Dawson, Y.T., only open in summer; and good-quality, year-round gravel roads from Atlin and Stewart in British Columbia. However, the Alaska Highway, now largely paved, is as heavily-travelled as all of the other roads combined; also, all of the latter are tributary to it. Although precise statistics are not available, it would appear that about 70% of the American tourists who visit the Territory in their own vehicles during the summer arrive via the Alaska Highway. In most cases their ultimate destination is Alaska. However, Whitehorse is an obligatory stop-over for most of these travellers because of its size, its strategic location more than halfway up the highway, and the many services for motorists and tourists offered here. The accommodations sector is particularly well developed in Whitehorse; there are now over 900 hotel, motel and housekeeping units within the expanded city limits as well as recreational vehicle parks and campgrounds. Because the city's tourist infrastructure is now designed primarily to accommodate Alaska Highway travellers, the tourist industry here could continue to function at an acceptable level even if it were no longer possible to attract cruise ship passengers from Skagway, although the loss of such a clientele would be keenly felt.

## CONCLUSION

The loss of so many White Pass jobs was a major blow for Skagway. However, the ore terminal was reopened in 1986, the White Pass freight terminal is functioning once again, and there has been seasonal use of the Alaskan section of the railway since 1988, so some of these jobs have been recovered. In addition, the National Park Service is now a major employer in Skagway, with eight permanent employees and over 30 seasonal employees, including a number of former White Passers. The economy of the town has nevertheless become increasingly dependent upon tourism, a highly seasonal activity whose ups and downs are largely a function of the vagaries of the cruise ship and package tour industries.

For Whitehorse and the Yukon, the loss of passenger rail service to the sea was compensated for by the creation of an all-weather road link between Carcross and Skagway. Most Yukoners have therefore not been seriously inconvenienced by the shutdown of the WP&YR. Also, the number of summer visitors from the coast does not appear to have declined, and as a consequence the city's tourist industry continues to function at a high level. The loss of the railway has nevertheless been felt in other and more important ways. The WP&YR allowed the shipment of the region's mineral products directly to tidewater at an acceptable cost; it also allowed most general freight to be brought into the Territory more cheaply and efficiently than by the Alaska Highway (Canadian Transport Commission, 1983 and 1984). Since 1982, companies operating in the region have had to adjust to an entirely new set of transportation conditions. For example, when silver-lead production was resumed at Elsa in the early 1980s, United Keno Hill Mines, a long-time user of the WP&YR and the port of Skagway, began overland delivery of its concentrates to the Cominco smelter at Trail in southern British Columbia, and continued to do so until January, 1989, when it closed its mines and mill because of the low price of silver. When Brinco's asbestos mine at Cassiar, B.C., resumed production, it abandoned the Whitehorse-Skogway route (which it had previously used to ship about 30% of its production) in favour of Highway 37 and the port of Stewart, B.C.. As a consequence, a number of jobs were permanently lost in Whitehorse, which had been the transshipment point for these products.

The White Pass and Yukon Corporation survived the closing of its railway and continues to provide a variety of land transportation and other services within the Yukon. Also, the company remains a power within the city of Whitehorse, where it is an important employer and major landholder. However, because of the sale of its tear-drop containers, and its lease of the Skagway ore terminal to a third party, it has lost its capability to move large volumes of ore to tidewater by rail. Without ore shipments, regular year-round train service between Whitehorse and Skagway is uneconomic, so it is unlikely that such a service will be resumed. However, there may be a potential for a tourist-oriented (therefore, seasonal) passenger rail service between the two communities, especially now that trains are running once again along the Alaskan section of the line. It is therefore too soon to write the requiem for the White Pass and Yukon Route railway. It will suffice at this time to say that the WP&YR was a remarkable enterprise which profoundly marked the social and economic history of the Yukon throughout most of the twentieth century. The railway was also "the most lasting legacy of the gold rush. That life in the Yukon did not return to its pre-1896 state is attributable in full to its existence" (Bennett, 1978, p. 59).

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